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BLM Releases Internal Report on Johnson Valley OHV Race Permit *Abbey Issues Directive to Strengthen Safety and Oversight at Events*

An internal review by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released today found its policies and procedures for permitting off-highway vehicle (OHV) events are sound, but the agency did not adhere to these procedures in permitting Mojave Desert Racing (MDR) Production's California 200, the race that resulted in eight spectator fatalities in a tragic accident in San Bernardino County on August 14, 2010.

In response to the report, BLM National Director Bob Abbey issued instructions to all BLM field offices nationwide that "reinforce the importance of following our procedures aimed at ensuring safety at all these events throughout the West. My clear directive is: if our field offices cannot fulfill or complete all the required steps in authorizing this event, then no permit will be issued." The Director's policy can be viewed at <http://www.blm.gov/>

"This tragic accident was a call for us to take an unvarnished look at what went wrong and what BLM can do to improve safety and oversight of these types of races," Acting BLM State Director Jim Abbott said. "We are cooperating fully with the California Highway Patrol's ongoing investigation into the accident, but our own internal review found we did not follow agency procedures in permitting and overseeing the event. We have swiftly taken corrective action by implementing the recommendations of the review team, raising the bar for oversight and safety at all such events, and moving forward with a sense of shared responsibility and accountability."

Abbott said the internal BLM inquiry he chartered immediately after the accident was prepared by a team of experts from throughout the West and Washington, D.C. Abbott asked that group to review both the MDR permit issuance and review BLM's handling of all SRPs throughout the California Desert, where OHV recreation has long been a highly popular activity.

The inquiry team found BLM's procedures were not carried out in the MDR permit. The report also found that this shortcoming was not limited to this event or BLM field office, but that adherence to these procedures was inconsistent throughout the five BLM field offices in the 11-million-acre California Desert.

The report concludes with specific action items to ensure effective special recreation permit administration and safety compliance at events; some are immediate and others long term. These include providing adequate BLM ranger and recreation staffing at all events, requiring companies to compensate the BLM for processing and administering permits that take up more than 50 hours of staff time, and requiring more oversight from the District and State Office of BLM to check for policy compliance and program consistency.

Abbott said BLM-California has already taken steps to ensure all approval procedures are carefully followed in issuing permits to assure “seamless implementation” here in California. Since the accident, four special recreation permit applications have been denied and five applications submitted by the promoter of the California 200 are being held in abeyance, pending completion of the CHP's investigation. More than a dozen authorized SRP events have occurred since August 14, all with appropriate BLM law enforcement and management staff oversight.

Appropriate BLM personnel actions are being taken in accordance with Federal laws and policies, but specifics cannot be disclosed due to the Privacy Act.

The full report is available online at www.blm.gov/ca. Director Abbey's Instruction Memorandum is also available at the same address.